

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

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SCRIPTURE: John 3:1-8

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child,
 he shall not enter therein.

Many of you who are listening to me at this moment are dead. Your body is alive; you live and move and breathe, but you are dead in trespasses and sins. Within you there is an immortal spirit; but even this immortal spirit may be dead in one sense of the word. Spiritual death is separation from God -- the kind of death first suffered by Adam and Eve when they became disobedient and were driven out of Eden and out of God's presence. That is why I say that many who now think they live are dead. Their body may live a few days or a few years longer, but when the body dies, the spirit will be taken home to God only to find that a spirit which has been rebellious, disobedient, careless, negligent, and sinful in this life cannot comfortably remain where God is. Separation from God is death.

The atonement of Christ through the power of his resurrection, was designed to redeem men, and bring them back into the presence of God clothed in immortal and incorruptible bodies. We lose much of the significance of Christ's resurrection and atonement unless we realize that by his incarnation he brought God to man; that by his resurrection he took back into the presence of God a human body, a body born of woman -- glorified, transfigured, perfected, and raised to immortality. By the power of that resurrection, we too shall be raised to immortality, and brought into the presence of God. In the language of Job, "Though my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

This infinite atonement of Christ is efficacious for all men. But what good will it do for a man who is spiritually dead to be physically resurrected and brought before God's presence, only to find that in his wickedness and rebellion he cannot tolerate the perfect brightness, the glory, the perfection of God -- that he can only shrink away and flee from that bright perfection which reveals his own sin, to dwell in the kingdom of darkness forever? There he will be forever alive as to the flesh, but forever dead as to the spirit, by reason of his separation from God.

If we are to live hereafter in God's kingdom, we must have the life of the kingdom dwelling in us now. A lower kingdom is not transmuted into a higher kingdom save as the life of that higher kingdom descends into the lower kingdom, and lifts it up by the power of a higher life. For example, soil, which belongs to the mineral kingdom, must forever remain soil, unless a seed is planted in it -- a seed which contains the life of the higher vegetable kingdom. That life can then take the elements of the soil, and transmute them to the vegetable kingdom.

Jesus descended from the heavenly kingdom to this earthly kingdom, that his life might be given to those who would repent of their sin and rebellion, crucify self, and in faith submit their life to the transforming power of his life. Paul, who had experienced the new birth, and who knew what it was to have the life of Jesus in himself, transforming the old life into the life of the kingdom, wrote to the Galatians: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me..." To live a new life requires not just superficial reform, or partial change, but a new birth, a new life, a new creature. An unregenerate man goes on sinning, even with the best will in the world. But if the life of Christ has been begotten in him from above, so that this life lives in him and makes him a new creature, he lives now in the heavenly kingdom, and some day shall live in it with a new and glorious and perfected body. "Except a man be born again (or as the marginal reading says, "begotten from above") he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

What is necessary that we might experience the new birth? "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Repentance of sin, faith in God and in his Son Jesus Christ, are the beginning of the process. Baptism in water to symbolize the inward death and burial of the old man, and his resurrection from the watery grave to newness of life, is the next step. As Paul says in Romans 6:4: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

In baptism we are born of the water. Another experience is needed for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for Jesus said to the apostles in Acts 1:5: "John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. Paul at Ephesus found certain men who had been baptized with John's baptism, but not with the Holy Ghost. "Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied." (Acts 19:4-6) This indicates that it is the ordinance of laying on of hands by which the baptism of the Holy Spirit is conferred, which brings the new life of Christ Jesus into our lives, and makes us new creatures in him.

The new birth is manifested by certain results in the one who has been born of water and of the Spirit. He will be a new creature, not just a slight revision of the old. The new life will be indicated by humility that does not think primarily of self -- by love for all men, enemies as well as friends -- by repentance for past sins and a desire to replace the old sinful habits and ways with new habits of righteousness. The abiding presence of the life or Spirit of Christ will be manifested by the fruits of the Spirit -- love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. (Gal. 5:22-23) There will be instinctive resistance to all temptation, and repugnance for sin. "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not." (I John 5:18) "Whosoever is born of God doth not continue in sin; for the Spirit of God remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, having received that Spirit of promise." (I John 3:9 Insp. Ver.) "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." (I John 5:4)

It is useless for you to go on fighting sin in your own strength. The natural man who is carnal, sensual, devilish, sinful, and rebellious, does not want to overcome sin. The **earthly kingdom** cannot lift itself into the heavenly kingdom by its own bootstraps. The life of Christ must take over your life. You must be born of water and of the Spirit, or you cannot see the kingdom of God. To live a new life requires a new creature in Christ Jesus. Therefore we beseech you in the name of Christ, "Put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."